

EXHIBIT 5

DATE 1/9/07

HB 2



## Montana Economic Developers Association

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January 8, 2007

Representative Rick Ripley, Chair  
Natural Resources and Commerce Appropriations Subcommittee  
Montana House of Representatives  
State Capitol  
PO Box 200400  
Helena, MT 59620-0400

Re: Montana Department of Commerce Economic Development Programs

Dear Representative Ripley:

The Montana Economic Developers Association (MEDA) represents over 200 professionals who work for local economic development organizations across the State of Montana. At our fall conference held in Havre, we finalized our agenda for the current legislative session. A top priority for our organization during the 2007 Legislative Session is the Workforce Training Grant (WTG) Program.

The 2005 Legislature established this program and appropriated \$2.8 million for the biennium. MEDA welcomed this action, as it was the first time that our state has allocated funds for a new worker job training program. Most other states have operated similar programs for many years.

It is crucial that the WTG Program be renewed and that the funding level is increased. The Program ran out of funding midway through the current biennium. MEDA strongly supports the request for an \$8 million appropriation contained in HB2. Funds from the WTG Program were invested in solid economic development projects, resulting in the creation of hundreds of new jobs as a result of the state's ability to help employers meet their job training needs. The program must be renewed and the funding increased to ensure that employers everywhere in Montana have equal access to this important economic development resource.

MEDA also supports the other Department of Commerce appropriation requests in HB2, including Tribal Economic Development, the Montana Technical Marketing Assistance Partnership, and Main Street. Each of these programs involve a partnership between the State of Montana, local economic development organizations, and private businesses that improves the economy of Montana and, most importantly, invests in our workforce.

Sincerely,

Rick Edwards, President

Cc: MEDA Board of Directors

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